

84
COMMERCE IN THE HUMAN SPECIES, AND THE EN-
SLAVING OF INNOCENT PERSONS, INIMICAL TO THE
LAWS OF MOSES AND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

—
A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

LITTLE PRESCOT STREET, GOODMAN'S FIELDS,

JANUARY 29, 1792.

BY ABRAHAM BOOTH.

—
BEHOLD THE TEARS OF SUCH AS WERE OPPRESSED, AND THEY
HAD NO COMFORTER; AND ON THE SIDE OF THEIR OPPRES-
SORS THERE WAS POWER; BUT THEY HAD NO COMFORTER.
ECCLESIASTES. IV. 1.

REMEMBER HEAVEN HAS AN AVENGING ROD;
TO SMITE THE POOR IS TREASON AGAINST GOD. COWPER.

—
SECOND EDITION.
—

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A

S E R M O N, &c.

Exod. xxi. 16.

HE THAT STEALETH A MAN AND SELLETH HIM, OR
IF HE BE FOUND IN HIS HAND, HE SHALL SURELY
BE PUT TO DEATH.

TO adore our Almighty Maker, to confide in the
Lord Redeemer, and to exercise genuine bene-
volence toward all mankind, manifestly include both
our duty and happiness in the present state. To the
first we are bound as reasonable creatures; to the se-
cond we are encouraged, by the gospel, as perishing
sinners; and to the last we are obliged as social be-
ings, surrounded with multitudes of our own species.
To promote this worship of God our Creator, this
confidence in Christ the Redeemer, and this cordial
affection for our neighbours, is the great end of an
evangelical ministry, and of all divine institutions that
are of a religious kind. For this end are we now
assembled; and to plead the cause of moral justice,
of true benevolence, and of compassion, relative to
the poor oppressed Africans, I have read that part
of sacred writ which is now before us. Yes, my
Brethren,

Brethren, I now stand to bear a public testimony against that diversified iniquity which is inseparable from a commerce in the human species—that commerce which is called the *Slave Trade*, together with its numerous and horrid consequences.

That slavery against which I am going to plead is not of a civil or political kind, but entirely of a *personal* nature. For though it is much to be wished that liberty, in a civil and political sense, may be enjoyed and flourish, without licentiousness, in all the nations of the earth; yet I never thought subjects of that nature proper to be discussed in the pulpit, and especially on the Lord's day. But the exercise of moral justice, of benevolence, and of humanity, being enforced by every principle of evangelical truth; an endeavour to promote those virtuous affections toward our extremely degraded and oppressed fellow-creatures, the Negroes, must be completely consistent with the commands of divine law, the grace of the glorious gospel, and the solemnities of public worship.

It may be proper for me here to remark, that it is not against *personal* slavery, as absolutely, universally, and in every possible case, evil, that I am going to speak. By no means. For a man may so violate the laws and rights of society, as justly to forfeit his liberty; as to deserve slavery—*slavery*, in a strict and proper sense—that he may be an example to others, and compensate, as far as lies in his power, the injuries done to society by an abuse of his own liberty. Yet even in this case, the holding of his posterity, not guilty of similar crimes, in a state of slavery, would be a flagrant violation of justice.—It is, then, against the stealing, the purchasing, and the enslaving of innocent persons, that I intend to argue—*innocent*, not in a moral, but in a civil sense. For if we consider ourselves as the subjects of Jehovah's moral government, we are all guilty; we all deserve to

to perish, and lie at his mercy: nor would any man have the least ground of complaint against the divine conduct, were Eternal Justice to plunge him in final ruin. But with regard to that relation in which men stand to a secular sovereign, and as members of civil society, the case is widely different. For here they may be *innocent*; and, being so, are completely entitled to personal freedom.

In pursuance of my design, I shall now show, That the law in our text, though given to the ancient Hebrews as a body politic, proceeds on a moral ground—That though God, in certain cases, permitted the Israelites to purchase their fellow-creatures for servitude; yet that purchase and servitude were attended with such restrictions, as rendered them essentially different from the European Slave Trade and its consequences—That supposing God had permitted the Israelitish people to traffic in the human species, and to enslave the Gentiles in a much greater degree than he did; it would not have warranted the conduct of Europeans toward the Africans—And, that the European commerce in man, and the slavery consequent upon it, are absolutely inimical to the precepts of Jesus Christ, and the whole scope of his doctrine.

FIRST, *The law in our text, though given to the ancient Hebrews as a body politic, proceeds on a moral ground.*

That no great labour of proof is necessary to evince the truth of this proposition, a small degree of reflection will show. For though the divine law before us was manifestly given to the Israelites, as part of their judicial code, and was intended to regulate their conduct one toward another; yet it no less apparently proceeds on the same principle with that prohibition of the decalogue, *Thou shalt not steal*. So Paul, with reference perhaps to this very passage, says; *The law is not made for a righteous man, but for—murderers of fathers*

fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslaughter, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for MEN-STEALERS, for liars, for perjured persons. Manstealing is here classed with such crimes as are most detestable in the sight of God, most pernicious to society, and most deserving of death by the sword of the civil magistrate. Manstealing, therefore, must be considered as a moral evil—universally evil, in every age and in every nation. Nor is it only an evil, but one of the first magnitude against our neighbour. If he who pilfers any one's property, steals a sheep, robs on the highroad, or commits a burglary, he considered and treated as a thief, a robber, a pest of society; of what enormous villainy must he be guilty, who kidnaps my honest neighbour, my faithful servant, my dutiful child, or my affectionate wife, to transport the one or the other to a country entirely unknown, and never thence to return! This outrage on the sacred rights of liberty, of justice, and of humanity, is greatly enhanced, if that worst of thieves intend, either to treat them himself as the most abject of slaves, like those in the British West Indies; or to sell them for that most infamous and cruel purpose. In either of these cases, and much more when both are united, reason and conscience, the common sentiments and feelings of mankind, will all unite, if not debauched by avarice, or blunted by habit, in approving this law of Jehovah as just; *He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, HE SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH.* Nor is there a man upon earth, not even among those who are grown hoary in the trade of manstealing, or in bartering "brandy and baubles" for human flesh and blood; that would not execrate the character of him to whose power or subtilty he had fallen a victim for similar purposes, and that would not pronounce him *worthy of death.*

Now, if this law of the Lord, given to the ancient Hebrews, be founded on a strictly moral principle; if it

it rest on the broad basis of common rectitude, of justice, and of humanity; as the manstealer himself deserves to die for his flagitious crime, the *purchaser* of those who are become the victims of his avarice cannot be accounted innocent. *Innocent!* far from it! For his known, or, at least, supposed readiness to buy unoffending fellow-creatures, is generally the *principal* motive to the commission of the horrid theft. There is a vulgar saying, "If there were no receivers, there would be no thieves." It is on the principle of that old observation the criminal law of this country proceeds, in punishing the purchasers of stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen: and it is much to be lamented that this part of our criminal code should have no force, relative to British subjects, who purchase on the coasts of Africa, not a little despicable property, but innocent *persons*, knowing, or having the highest possible presumptive reason to believe, that they were stolen! How insulting to moral justice, and how affronting to common sense, that those very persons who, in England, would be flogged at the cart's tail, or perhaps transported to Botany Bay, for secretly purchasing five shillings-worth of property, knowing it to have been stolen; should have it in their power publicly to buy and sell whole families of stolen, innocent Africans, with complete impunity, and without violating any prohibitory law of the land! As if rectitude and robbery were local things! the former losing its respectability, and the latter its turpitude, whenever the liberty and the lives of harmless Negroes become the object of British avarice! Or as if it were equally consistent with private justice and national honour, annually to fit out a number of ships, furnished with manacles, chains, and fetters, for cargoes of harmless men and women; as it is for the Greenland traders to equip others, for the capturing and stowage of all that is valuable in whales and seals — It being apparent, then, that the law under consideration rests on a moral ground, I shall proceed to show,

8 Commerce in Man, and West India Slavery,

SECONDLY, That though God, in certain cases, permitted the Israelites to purchase their fellow-creatures for servitude; yet that purchase and servitude were attended with such restrictions, as rendered them essentially different from the European Slave Trade and its consequences.

There were two cases in which an Israelite himself might, according to divine law, be sold into a state of servitude. These were, *theft*, and *insolvency*. Relative to the former, the Mosaic statute runs thus: *If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief—have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft**. Here it is manifest the laws of the Hebrews had such a regard for personal freedom, that even a *thief* was not considered as a proper subject of sale and servitude, except he was unable to make the appointed restitution.

The Mosaic statutes permitted *insolvent* debtors to be sold for the benefit of their creditors: but then the servitude to which such debtors were obliged, was far from being oppressive and cruel. For thus runs the law of the case: *If thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a BOND-SERVANT, but as an HIRED servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile; and then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return—Thou shalt not rule over him with RIGOUR: but shalt fear thy God†. So strictly, in this case, did the divine law guard against severity and oppression in the servitude!—Besides, the duration of that servitude, both in regard to theft and insolvency, was at the longest ex-*

* Exod. xxii. 1—4.

† Lev. xxv. 39—43. See 2 Kings iv. 1. Matt. xviii. 24, 25.

pressly limited to six years. For thus it is written: *If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.* Nay, respecting those who had been sold for debt, it is, in another place, enacted: *When thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him*.* How different all this from the laws relating to slavery in the West India islands! It is evident, therefore, that the servitude to which any of Abraham's natural posterity were exposed, was not, properly speaking, *slavery*; and much less was it similar to that which is endured by many thousands of Negroes in our sugar islands.

The state and circumstances of certain Gentiles among the ancient Hebrews, now claim our consideration; because the situation of those Heathens, and the Mosaic law respecting them, afford the most plausible argument that can be deduced from the Scripture, in favour of West India slavery. Relative to this case the law of Jehovah says: *Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the Heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land†.*—On this divine statute it may be remarked, that it did not *require*, but only *permit*, the Israelites to purchase Heathens for a lower degree of servitude than that in which any Hebrew might be employed. That is, if they held bondservants at all, those meanest of servants must be had from among the Gentiles.—This law did not warrant the Israelites to go by sea or land to a far-distant country, as the slave-merchants now do, to pur-

* Exod. xxi. 2. Deut. xv. 12—15. † Lev. xxv. 44, 45.

chase their fellow-creatures for servitude ; but ordered, if they made any such purchase, that it should be either of the strangers who sojourned among them, or of the petty Heathen states that were around them. —The bondservice permitted by this law, could not, with the least appearance of reason, be so understood by the Hebrews, as to think themselves warranted to exercise oppression and cruelty upon their Gentile servants ; because, to treat strangers of any description in that manner, was most expressly and repeatedly forbidden *. So far was divine law, relative to the treatment of either males or females in a state of servitude, from authorizing an offended master to exercise cruelty upon their persons, that its language is ; *If a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish ; HE SHALL LET HIM GO FREE FOR HIS EYE'S SAKE. And if he smite out his man-servant's tooth, or his maid-servant's tooth ; HE SHALL LET HIM GO FREE FOR HIS TOOTH'S SAKE* †. Again : *He that killeth ANY MAN shall surely be put to death—Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the STRANGER as for one of your own country ; for I am the Lord your God* ‡. How essentially different is this from the British Colonial laws, respecting the treatment of slaves !

There is great reason to conclude, that the divine permission which is under our notice, was limited to the remains of those Canaanitish nations, the extermination of which had been consigned to Israel. To this conclusion we are led by the following considerations.—Divine law, as already observed, was far from authorizing the chosen tribes to visit distant continents, in order to capture or to purchase their fellow-creatures, either for their own use, or to barter with other nations ; making commerce in the human species an established article of their trade, which, to our immortal infamy, is now the case with

* Exod. xxii. 21. xxiii. 9. Lev. xxv. 35. Deut. x. 17, 18, 19. xxiv. 14, 15, 17. xxvii. 19. Ezek. xxii. 7. † Exod. xxi. 26, 27. ‡ Lev. xxiv. 17, 22.

us. No: the attention of the Israelities, respecting this instance of Jehovah's pleasure, was directed to the *neighbouring* Gentile states, and to them only.—Though the natives of Gentile nations in general, when residing among the Israelites, were denominated *strangers*, and though none of them were to be treated with cruelty; yet the Mosaic laws did not consider them as all on a level, or as equally entitled to the benevolence of the Hebrews. For while God permitted some of those aliens to be purchased and placed in the state of *bondservants*, which was expressly prohibited, with regard to any Israelite; he required, in the very same chapter, that others of them, if oppressed with poverty, should experience all that compassion which was due to the descendants of Abraham, when in a similar situation. Respecting this particular, the law was; *If thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a STRANGER, or a SOJOURNER; that he may live with thee**. Hence arises no small degree of presumptive evidence, that none but strangers of the Canaanitish race were to be purchased for *bondservants*.—It does not appear that the Israelites were warranted by their Eternal Sovereign, to carry their arms into distant countries, except when those countries were the aggressors. Their commission to invade, to subjugate, or to destroy, was limited, if I be not under a great mistake, to the flagitious inhabitants of that land, which, by a divine grant, had been expressly consigned to Abraham and his posterity. It is natural to conclude, therefore, that the law which authorized the descendants of Abraham to purchase fellow-creatures of the Heathens around them for *bondservants*, had its operation limited to the remains of those Canaanitish nations.—The history of the Gibeonites is, if I mistake not, perfectly conformable to this view of the case. Those Hivites constituted a part of the Canaanitish nations

* Lev. xxv. 35. † Joshua ix.

whom

whom God had ordered to be subdued. Alarmed with apprehensions of impending ruin, they, by an act of deception, made a league with Israel, preserved their own lives, and were permitted to dwell among the chosen people : but, as an expression of resentment against their disingenuity, and as a mark of their being part of those nations against whom the severity of punishment had been denounced, they were placed in a state of inferiority, and occupied in mean employments*. We find, however, that when Saul had treated their posterity with cruelty, the divine anger was roused ; and God was offended with David, for not having avenged that cruelty in a more early part of his reign†.—We have another instance much to our purpose, in the reign of David's illustrious successor, of whom it is thus recorded ; *All the people that were left of the Amorites, Hittites, Perrizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, which were not of the children of Israel ; their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, UPON THOSE DID SOLOMON LEVY A TRIBUTE OF BOND-SERVICE UNTO THIS DAY. But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen : but they were men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen‡.* Whence it appears, that *bondservice* among the ancient Hebrews was not contrasted with the *natural rights of humanity*, as in the case of West India slavery ; but with *military* services, and with *honourable* employments in the state. No ; the lives even of the Canaanitish people were not, by cruel bondage, rendered a burden to them : for though, in a *comparative* sense, they were slaves, and excluded from respectable stations ; yet they were under the protection of divine law, and enjoyed the rights of men, though not of citizens. An essentially different situation, therefore, from that of the Negro Slaves in our plantations !

* Joshua ix. † 2 Sam. xxi. ‡ 1 Kings ix. 20, 21, 22.

As the case of those Canaanitish Heathens is the only thing which, in the laws of Moses, and in the authorized conduct of the Israelites, bears almost any resemblance to that personal slavery against which I plead; it may be expedient briefly to enquire into the reasons of it. Be it observed, then, that God, being the Creator of all things, is the universal Proprietor. No one has either liberty, or life, except by a grant from God. If therefore that grant be recalled, men cease to have any claim to those dearest of all temporal enjoyments.---Mankind having revolted from God, and rebelled against him, they have universally forfeited their all to Eternal Justice. God may therefore justly deprive them of their property, their liberty, or their lives, according to his own sovereign pleasure, without being accountable to any of his creatures.---The Canaanitish nations, it is evident, were *extremely wicked**. The universal Sovereign might, therefore, with apparent propriety make them, in the present world, examples of his justice: that not only his chosen people, but others, in distant countries, might learn to revere his righteous government, and stand in awe of his terrible judgments. He was perfectly at liberty, therefore, to permit the Israelites to purchase those Canaanites for *bondservants*, and to inflict such hardships upon them as he pleased. Nay, he might not only permit, but expressly *command* them, to treat those devoted people in such a manner as would have been enormously criminal, detached from that command. Thus, for instance, it would have been highly criminal for the Israelites to have invaded the Canaanitish country, had not he who is the Universal Proprietor and Absolute Sovereign ordered them so to do. But, as that land was his own; as, by a divine grant, it had been consigned to Abraham's posterity; and as the tribes of Jacob were ordered to invade the country, to subdue its inhabitants, and to take possession, their conduct

* See Lev. xviii. 6---30.

in so doing was lawful.---It would have been still more criminal for the chosen seed to have attempted, not only the conquest, but also the *extermination* of those devoted nations, had not the Lord commanded it. But he, by whose command they were to be extirpated, was equally at liberty to order their execution by the sword of Israel; as to have destroyed them by an earthquake, by the pestilence, or, as in the case of Sodom, by fire from heaven.---It is on this ground, as I conceive, that the Mosaic laws relative to *bondservants* proceed; the degrading service itself being subjected to the forementioned limitations.---I must now show,

THIRDLY, *That supposing God had permitted the Israelitish people to traffic in the human species, and to enslave the Gentiles in a much greater degree than he did; it would not have authorized the conduct of Europeans toward the Africans.*

To prove and illustrate this position, the following particulars may not be impertinent. The Israelites, as a body politic, were the peculiar people of God, in distinction from all other nations then upon earth. But this is not the case with any people now in the world. While the Mosaic Dispensation continued, that singular and high prerogative was exclusively enjoyed by the Jews: but when the Christian Œconomy was established, that prerogative ceased; nor did any other nation succeed to the honour. If the English, for instance, the Dutch, the French, or the Spaniards, were to claim the privilege; it would behove them to produce the divine charter by which it was granted. But it is manifest that no such authority can be adduced.—God, under that sublimest of all names, JEHOVAH, was not only the object of religious worship to the chosen people; but also their political monarch. The whole statute law of that kingdom, as well judicial, as moral and religious, was of his enacting: and on the observing that system
of

of law which was promulgated by Jehovah, their national happiness depended. Now it is plain from what has been said, that the divine statute which authorized the Hebrews to purchase persons of the nations around them for *bond-servants*, belonged to the judicial part of their legal code. But what nation pretends now to be governed by a system of law that is divine, or to have Jehovah for its political sovereign?---The Canaanitish country was, by Jehovah, expressly given to the Israelites for their inheritance; which rendered it lawful for them to conquer and possess it. But what nation in Europe has the least pretence to a divine grant of any particular district on the African continent?---Divine justice doomed the profligate and impious Canaanitish nations to destruction, or to a low state of subjugation; and Abraham's posterity were expressly appointed to execute the sentence. But to which of the European powers has God committed the execution of similar judgments upon the Africans?---Those whom Jehovah permitted his people to buy, for a comparative degree of slavery, were to be, either Canaanites residing among them; or persons of the same description in the nations around them. But will this warrant our having recourse to a distant continent, for the purpose of purchasing and enslaving its innocent inhabitants?---Those Gentiles whom God permitted the Hebrews to buy, were to be employed in low services among themselves. But will this justify the English, or any commercial people, in purchasing Negroes and selling them to other nations? The *former* were treated as *men*, who, in the divine estimation, had forfeited the rights of citizens: but the *latter*, like *beasts* of burden, or as articles of mere commerce.---Canaanitish bond-servants, among the Israelites, were under the protection of divine law, which prohibited the exercise of cruelty upon them. But will any defender of West India slavery pretend, that our Colonial laws afford an equal degree of protection to the poor Negroes?

Again:

Again: The ancient distinction between Jews and Gentiles being entirely abolished, by the divine establishment of Christianity; those prerogatives that were peculiar to Judaism and its professors, do not now exist: among which prerogatives, the right of purchasing Gentiles for bond-servants is to be classed. Consequently, it is now as criminal and wicked for Europeans, either to steal, or to purchase and sell, the innocent Africans, for slaves; as it would have been for the Israelites to have stolen, sold, and enslaved one another: which, nevertheless, as appears from our text itself, was absolutely forbidden under the severest of all temporal penalties.---Nay, supposing our own countrymen, for instance, could prove, that they have succeeded to the ancient Israelitish prerogative respecting this matter; yet, from the particulars adduced in the preceding paragraph, it is apparent that their conduct would stand condemned by the Mosaic law. This would be more strikingly evident still, were I to lay before you the deceitful arts and iniquitous violence which are frequently used to obtain the poor Africans in their own country---the cruel manner in which they are stowed on board the ships, when transported to the West India islands---the brutal mode of exposing them to sale when there---the inhuman separation of brothers and sisters,* of parents and children, of husbands and wives, on that infamous occasion---and the cruelty with which they are generally treated, when employed in the sugar islands*. For were these things described in detail, as they appear in the testimonies of numerous respectable witnesses, they would make your ears tingle; they would shock your tender feelings; they would rouse your indignation against a trade so degrading to humanity, and so enormously wicked.

* See *An Abstract of the Evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, relative to the Slave Trade, passim.* Sold by J. PHILLIPS, George-yard, Lombard-street. Price 9d.

Further:

Further: Supposing the lawfulness of purchasing and of enslaving our innocent fellow-creatures were granted, it would be natural to ask; For *whom* is it lawful, and on *what description* of unoffending persons does the exercise of that despotic right fall? Is it lawful for the English, the French, the Europeans in general, to buy and enslave the Africans? But whence did they, rather than those very Africans, derive that dreadful right? I say, *dreadful* right. For the idea of any individual, or of any people, possessing authority to treat the innocent as if they were flagitiously guilty, is hateful, and shocking to reason, to conscience, and to common sense.---Whence, then, I demand, is that authority derived? From the Europeans professing Christianity, the Africans in question being Pagans? But, as those Pagans are men, are neighbours, are brethren of the human kind; so Christianity is the religion of truth and of justice, of benevolence and of peace. It inspires them by whom it is known, and not disgraced, with love to God and love to their neighbours. Whereas the *traffic in MAN* is unjust and cruel, is barbarous and savage.---Does, then, the right in question originate in divine law, as given to the ancient Israelites? but those laws that were peculiar to the Hebrew theocracy have long been obsolete: nor, were they in full force, would the present *MAN-trade* be countenanced by them. As to that part of the Jewish law which is properly and strictly speaking *moral*, the obligation of which extends to all mankind in every age; it forbids nothing to an African, that is equitable in the conduct of a European. It knows no more of a *white* man buying and enslaving a *black* one; than it does of the *latter* so treating the *former*. In its impartial estimate, and under its commanding power, Africans and Europeans, Pagans and Christians, are all on a level.---Must the right under consideration, then, be inferred from what is called the law of *nature*? But that is the same in Africa, as it is in Europe; entirely the same all over the globe. According to this law, be the station of an *innocent*

Negro ever so obscure, his poverty ever so great, his manners ever so rude, or his mental capacities ever so contracted, he has an equal claim to personal liberty with any man upon earth. For the rights of humanity being common to the whole of our species, are the same in every part of the world.

It follows, therefore, that if the lawfulness of purchasing innocent persons for the most degrading and cruel slavery exist among men, it must be a common right, and equally possessed by all nations: nor can the exercise of it have any limitation from principles of a *moral* nature. No limits can be here assigned, except those of power, of policy, or of inclination. It would, consequently, be quite as equitable, benevolent, and humane, for the Africans, laden with produce of their own country, annually to visit our English ports, as we do theirs, and for similar purposes. Yes, they might, if it were in their power, with equal justice and with less dishonour, fit out a hundred and eighty, or two hundred ships, for the port of London, of Bristol, and of Liverpool---ships adapted to the *stowage* of MAN, and furnished with a frightful apparatus to render the confinement of Britons completely miserable, as well as perfectly secure. When this commercial, this *man*-trading fleet arrived, if cargoes of men, women, and children were not prepared; the officers belonging to each vessel might practise all their arts, to excite a spirit of covetousness and of cruelty in our governors and fellow subjects: in order that, by an armed force, the peaceable inhabitants of whole villages might be captured---that, in our courts of justice, innocent persons, for the advantage of their judges, might be convicted---that private individuals might kidnap whomsoever they could, and thought saleable---that, by all these infamous means, the ships might be freighted, at every returning season, with forty thousand Britons---and, finally, that all who survive their miserable confinement while on board, might be taken to the best market for the
human

human species; exposed, in the most indecent manner, to public sale; handled and examined, like so many head of cattle, by their purchasers; consigned over, with their unborn posterity, to the most abject and cruel slavery, from generation to generation; and all for—what? Here let humanity blush, let mercy weep, and let justice be roused into indignation: but let not Britons forget, that this is a picture, in miniature, of their own behaviour toward the Africans!

Once more: Were the conduct of our man-merchants lawful, neither the principles of morality, nor those of religion, could lie in the way of their buying, and selling for slaves, the innocent natives of Holland, or France, or any other neighbouring nation. For as it is impossible to prove that the natural rights of humanity are not equally sacred in Africa, as they are in Europe; so the cruel and bloody hand of rapacity might with equal justice lay hold of the Dutchman, or the Frenchman, as of the swarthy Guineaman. Nor, other things being equal, is there the least reason for us to imagine, that the white skin of a European would afford any more protection against a violent seizure, than does the black skin of an African. No; had the trader in *man* an equal opportunity of gratifying his cruel avarice; were he equally sure of impunity, and no more exposed to infamy, in the one case than in the other; the same disregard to justice, and the same principle of avarice, would have a similar operation on the persons of neighbouring Europeans, as they have on the poor Negroes.---Nay, he who is, by profession, a Negro Merchant; whose business it is to buy and sell his fellow creatures, without regard to their guilt, or their innocence; who has been in that practice for a course of years; who is habituated to it and hardened in it, so that he carries on his iniquitous commerce without remorse or shame, in the face of the sun; cannot be considered as restrained by any religious or virtuous principles, though he never attempted to purchase, for West Indian slavery, any

of his peaceable neighbours in *this* country. No; would the laws and customs of the land permit, as in former times*, he would no more scruple to encourage kidnapping in England, than in Africa; and be equally ready to buy a native of his own parish, as he would the inhabitants of a remote continent.---It appears therefore, with superior evidence, That the European commerce in man, and the slavery connected with it, are absolutely indefensible on the grounds of the Jewish law.---I now proceed to show,

FOURTHLY, *That the European Commerce in Man, and the Slavery consequent upon it, are absolutely inimical to the precepts of Jesus Christ, and to the whole scope of his Doctrine.*

* *As in former times.* Relative to this fact, Dr. HENRY says; "Slaves still continued to be a capital article, both in the internal and foreign trade of Britain. When an estate was conveyed from one proprietor to another, all the villains or slaves annexed to that estate were conveyed at the same time, and by the same deed. When any person had more children than he could maintain, or more domestic slaves than he chose to keep, he sold them to a merchant, who disposed of them either at home or abroad, as he found would be most profitable. *It was a common vice* (says GIRALDUS Cambrensis) *of the English when they were reduced to poverty, that rather than endure it patiently, they exposed their own children to sale.* Many of these unhappy persons were carried into Ireland, and no doubt into other countries, and there sold---A strong law was made against this barbarous kind of commerce, in a great Council held at St. Peter's, Westminster, A. D. 1102. *Let no man, for the future, presume to carry on the wicked trade of selling men in markets, like brute beasts, which hitherto hath been the common custom of England.* But this law did not put an end to the trade in slaves. For in the great Council held at Armagh, A. D. 1171---the whole clergy of Ireland, after having deliberated long concerning the cause of the calamities with which they were threatened by the invasion of the English, at length agreed, That the great judgment had been inflicted upon them by the displeasure of God, for the sins of the people; particularly for their having bought so great a number of English slaves, from merchants, pirates, and robbers, and for detaining them still in bondage. They therefore decreed, *That all the English slaves in the whole island of Ireland, should be immediately emancipated, and restored to their former liberty.*" *History of England*, Vol. VI. p. 267, 268, 269. Octavo edit.

To the PRECEPTS of *Jesus Christ*. For instance: *Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you.* Now, is not the whole of that system against which I plead, at irreconcilable enmity with the spirit of these divine precepts? If our sovereign Lord require genuine benevolence and active love to our *enemies*; he certainly cannot be satisfied with a less degree of social regard and virtuous affection, toward those who are *not* our enemies---those who never did us any evil; who never had it in their power to injure us; and who, perhaps, never heard of us. To treat *such* persons as if they had notoriously injured us in our dearest interests, and as if they were our implacable enemies; must be absolutely contrary to the divine requisition in these precepts, and to every dictate of moral duty. Yet such are the Negro Trade and its consequences, that the most diabolical malice, which ever existed in the heart of man against his bitterest enemy, could scarcely contrive or wish more aggravated misery to befall him in this life, than that under which many thousands of innocent, captured, and enslaved Africans groan.

Again: *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,* is another of our Lord's precepts. This admirably just and comprehensive command, requires each of us to treat every man, as we might reasonably wish every one to treat us, were situations and circumstances reversed. It considers every man AS a man, and requires that he be so treated. It impartially views every man, as having capacities, feelings, and rights, peculiar to his own species: and it forbids those capacities to be insulted by degradation, those feelings by unmerited pain, and those rights by injustice. But is not the horrid MAN-trade, and the detestable connections in which it stands, a manifest outrage on this most salutary precept? Do not that inhuman commerce, and the consequent cruel slavery, treat vast multitudes of human creatures, as if they had no share in the capacities,

cities, the feelings, or the rights of men? as if they were mere *brutes*, made to be taken and sold, enslaved and destroyed? He, therefore, who dares to vindicate such conduct might, on his *own* principles, be justly kidnapped, bought, and sold, for a similar state of slavery. Because whatever arguments prove that *any* innocent man has an inviolable claim to personal freedom, will equally prove the same thing respecting *every* one of that character.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. This has been frequently called, THE GOLDEN RULE. It recommends itself to every man's reason and conscience, as completely wise and good. Every one implicitly appeals to it as worthy of the highest regard, when his own rights are violated by his neighbour: nor must even the Negro merchants, or the slave-holders, be considered as insensible to the excellence of this moral precept, when their own persons, families, or interests, are concerned. For who among all the traders in man, and holders of slaves, would think himself treated with equity, were he, after having been kidnapped by a villain, to find his bones and sinews, his bowels and blood, exposed to sale, and actually purchased by one whose profession it was to *trade in the persons of men**? Must not his indignation rise, and would he not prefer instant death to a life of slavery, if an apprehension of eternal fire did not forbid? Nay, would not his indignation and anguish be greatly heightened, if possible, were his affectionate wife and his dutiful children in the same situation; just going to be separated, and never more to see one another? The very thought of such a catastrophe stings with distress; and yet if any man upon earth deserve to be so treated, it must be who has made it his business to buy and to enslave his innocent fellow creatures.

To the DOCTRINE of Christ. This doctrine is denominated *the gospel*, or *glad tidings*, by way of eminence. Yes, my Brethren, it is glad tidings of pardon, of peace, and of life eternal, through Jesus Christ, for perishing sinners. The gospel, strictly so called, is the doctrine of divine benevolence to man—of mercy to the miserable, and of grace to the unworthy. It reveals Jesus Christ as *coming into the world to save sinners*. Its whole business is with those that are justly condemned by divine law, and who deserve to perish. In this gracious gospel the Lord Redeemer addresses Jews and Gentiles, Europeans and Africans, without any difference; and his charming language is, *Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth—Come to Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest—Him that cometh to Me, I will in nowise cast out*.—Such are the benign import and the benevolent design of our Lord's doctrine! Consequently, its natural tendency must be to produce and promote love to God, and love to man. But nothing can be more inimical to that devout and kind affection, than the buying, the selling, and the enslaving of our innocent fellow-creatures. For that commerce and slavery originate in the basest avarice; are carried on by injustice and cruelty; and issue in the misery and murder of thousands, who have an equal claim to liberty and to happiness with ourselves.

Were you, my Brethren, maturely to consider the character of a *Slave Merchant*, it would be found, I presume, to include the following particulars. He is, by profession, a buyer and seller of men, women, and children. If not a kidnapper himself, he encourages, rewards, and rejoices in the practice: for without it his trade would be at a stand. Instead of delighting in the domestic happiness of others, universally, he makes it his business violently to separate the nearest and dearest relatives: for, conjugal, parental, and fraternal ties, are by him dissolved without

without the least remorse. So far is he from sympathizing with widows and orphans, as such, in their afflictions; that the distresses of multitudes under those characters arise from his rapacity. Such is the nature of his employment that it cannot succeed, without his fellow-creatures being deprived of their most sacred natural rights: because, for numbers to be divested of their personal freedom, their mental tranquility, their social connections, their bodily ease, and their pittance of property, is essential to the joy of his gain. His profession is, as a man of business, to provide victims for abject slavery, for pinching want, for capricious cruelty, for dark despair, and for untimely death in its various forms. His trade, as well as his profits, must cease, except he diversify and propagate human misery. He may call himself a *Christian*, or a disciple of Him that *went about doing good*; but the amiable character is profaned by his traffic in man: for it becomes none but a savage, or a votary of Moloch. He may, possibly, deserve commendation for the exercise of benevolent affections in his own family, and in the neighbourhood where he resides; but, considered as a *Trader in MAN*, he declares war against the dignity and happiness of his own species; he insults the laws of his Maker; and sustains a character that is completely fitted for universal abhorrence.—So enormously criminal are the trade and the slavery under our notice, that, had they commenced among Britons but a few years ago, and been practised only by five or six merchants and planters; the conduct of those concerned would have met with general execration; their characters would have been stigmatized with public infamy; and an intimacy with them would have been studiously avoided by every person of decent morals.—Nay, had the *MAN-trade*, the slavery consequent upon it, and the execrable wickedness of both, been of so recent a date, practised by so few, and the iniquitous transactions laid open to public view, as they now are; there is reason to conclude, that various articles of commerce,

merce, produced by the sweat, and groans, and tears of the poor Negroes, would have been considered by Britons as tinged with human blood. Did the Man after God's own heart, on a certain occasion, say; *Is not this the blood of the men that went and jeopardated their lives*?* so, it is probable, the generality of our countrymen would have said, respecting certain species of West India produce; *Are not these the BLOOD of innocent men, that have been stolen, and bought, and sold, and treated like brutes?* It behoves us to remember, however, that a system of iniquity is not sanctified by its inveteracy, nor yet by the multitudes concerned in it.—Evidently, therefore, does it appear, that the commerce and slavery of which I speak, are absolutely inimical to the precepts of Christ, and to the whole scope of his doctrine; as might be more largely proved, would time permit.

As our English seaports, Liverpool and Bristol, are infamously conspicuous in modern times for their trading in the persons and rights of men; so were Tyre and Zidon, in the ages of remote antiquity. Let us hear, then, what Jehovah says to the inhuman, though opulent merchants of those ancient cities. Thus run the divine remonstrance and the awful prediction: *What have ye to do with me, O Tyre and Zidon, and all the coasts of Palestine? Will ye render me a recompence? and if ye recompense me, swiftly and speedily will I return your recompence upon your own head: because—the children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye SOLD unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border. Behold I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: and I will SELL your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, and they shall sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off: for the Lord hath spoken it†.* Such was Jehovah's determination against

* 2 Sam. xxiii. 15, 16, 17. † Joel iii. 4—8. Compare Ezek. xxvii. Rev. xviii. 10—13.

Tyre and Zidon, the Liverpool and Bristol of ancient times!

It may perhaps be objected; Personal slavery, though authorized by the laws of Greece and Rome, and though much practised in the apostolic times, is nowhere expressly condemned in the New Testament: nay, Christian slaves are exhorted to live in peaceable subjection to their own masters. To this it may be replied: Nor was the sanguinary despotism of NERO expressly condemned; but the disciples of Christ were commanded to behave peaceably under his government. The sports of the gladiators, authorized by the Roman laws, were extremely bloody and wicked; yet are they nowhere expressly condemned by the Apostles. Numerous are the species of dishonesty and theft, which are common among us, and perhaps were so among people in those times; which, nevertheless, are not expressly forbidden in the New Testament. But, as all these things are breaches of moral duty; and as they are all inconsistent with that regard which is due to our neighbour's happiness; it is quite sufficient that they are implicitly and strongly forbidden by general moral principles, and by requisitions of a contrary conduct. Any man of common sense, whose mind is not biased by self-interest, may easily infer, from the general principles, commands and prohibitions of Christianity; that stealing an innocent man must be the worst of rapine; that buying such a kidnapped person is justifying the robbery; and that actually enslaving him, gives a sanction to those infamous deeds, by putting a finishing hand to the work of injustice.—Besides, as an express prohibition of slavery might have excited a more violent opposition to the Christian cause, than almost any thing with which it had to conflict; so, neither the doctrine of Christ, nor the spiritual nature of his kingdom, required it. If the gracious gospel found persons in a state of slavery, whether civil or personal,

sonal, it relieved their consciences and cheered their hearts; but it made no alteration respecting that slavery. The subject of a tyrannical civil governor continued to be a subject; and the slave of a private master continued to be a slave: except the governor and the master became acquainted with their own duty, and willing to perform it.

Having discussed my subject according to the plan proposed, I shall now conclude with a few exhortations relative to our own duty. As being professedly the followers of Christ, and the friends of mankind, I would exhort you, my Brethren, *earnestly and frequently to pray for the interposition of Providence to abolish the detestable traffic in man.* That it is our indispensable duty to pray for the enlargement of our Lord's visible kingdom among men, is plain; that the despised Africans are naturally as capable of being made the spiritual subjects of Jesus Christ as ourselves, ought not to be questioned; and that the Slave Trade is, at present, an effectual bar to the propagation of Christianity among them, appears with decisive evidence. Nay, it is an insuperable obstruction to the progress of civilization among them, and to an honourable commerce with them. Zeal for the honour of Christ, and love to our fellow-creatures, ought therefore to inspire us with ardent prayer, that the horrid impediment may be removed, and that Christ may be glorified among them.—Nor ought we to pray, merely that God would abolish the infamous commerce in man, on the shores of Africa; but also for the gradual emancipation of oppressed Negroes in the West India islands: that the slavery of innocent persons may cease to exist, and sink under the detestation of all Europe. For what must the enslaved Africans in those islands think of Christians, of Christianity, and of Christ, under the tuition of their oppressors?

Again : Let your ardent and frequent prayers be accompanied with prudent, peaceable, and steady efforts, in order to procure the total abolition of that criminal traffic, and of the cruel slavery consequent upon it. This is manifestly enjoined by that law of the Lord, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. A divine precept this, which requires us to do to others, as we might reasonably wish them to treat us, were we in their situation and they in ours.—When reflecting on this branch of moral duty, with reference to the case before us, I have sometimes been struck with the following supposed case. I have imagined myself, my family, and all my dearest social connections, with many thousands of my countrymen, to have been kidnapped, bought, and sold into a state of cruel slavery. I have imagined the inhabitants of my native country in general, to have received authentic information of the iniquitous manner in which we were captured, transported into a foreign land, and there enslaved. I have still further imagined, that extremely few among Britons had any compassion for us ; that only here and there one would remember us in their prayers, or exert any endeavours, either to relieve our distresses, or to prevent many thousands of equally innocent persons from falling, year after year, into similar miseries. I have then supposed, that, in such a situation, I should consider Britons as quite insensible to the honour of national character, to the claims of private justice, and to the finer feelings of civilized humanity. Nay, I have imagined that, when under paroxysms of pain, I should reflect on their merciless conduct with indignation ; consider them as devoted to the gain of oppression ; as filling up their measure of national guilt ; and as the destined objects of Divine vengeance.

On the other hand, I have supposed all those myriads of Negroes in our West India islands, that are groaning under cruel slavery, to be acquainted with the true God, and with the prayers of thousands in
this

this country, in order to procure a speedy abolition of the horrid traffic in man on the coasts of Africa, and a total, but *gradual* abolition of slavery in our sugar islands. I have then thought of the gratitude which must, on such a supposition, abound in the bosoms of those Negroes toward their compassionate friends; of the ten thousand times ten thousand prayers which they must address to the Father of mercies, that success may attend the cause of justice and of humanity in which their friends were sincerely engaged; and of the numerous benedictions which, from their hearts, they must pronounce on the persons, the families, and all the lawful pursuits, of those who are seeking to do them good.

On my own mind, these thoughts have sometimes made a strong impression, and have roused attention to the natural rights of oppressed Africans. For though they are ignorant of the true God, and unacquainted with our concern to promote their happiness; yet they are *men*, they are *brethren* of the human race: agreeable to that saying, *God hath made of one blood all nations of men*.—Few of them, indeed, can either speculate on our conduct respecting a melioration of their state, or pray for us; yet they are no less the proper objects of our benevolence, but rather deserve a greater degree of compassion on that account.

As it is our design at this time to make a collection for promoting the general design of that worthy *Society*, which has existed for some years in this Metropolis, in order to *effect the Abolition of the Slave Trade*; I would earnestly exhort you to make a liberal contribution for their assistance. The members of that benevolent Society have done worthily. They deserve the assistance and the thanks of every friend to moral justice, and to humanity. Let us therefore endeavour to strengthen their hands, and to promote the righteous cause in which they are united: not
doubting

doubting but the wisdom, the rectitude, and the benevolence of our British Legislature will ere long be manifested, in totally abolishing the English commerce in man; and in providing for the gradual emancipation of Negro Slaves in our West India islands.

To conclude, my Brethren, as each disinterested individual that is tolerably well informed respecting the subject before us, and maturely reflects upon it, cannot but detest both the Trade and the Slavery against which I plead; so every one is bound, by the authority of God, and by the regard which is due to his own immortal interests, to guard against every corruption within, and every temptation without, that would render him a slave to sin. Because it is possible for a man to be just, kind, and humane to his fellow creatures; while he is under the power of strong disaffection to God, and a subject of Satan's dominion. Having the *love of God shed abroad in our hearts*, and possessing the liberty of righteousness; it would be incomparably better for us, after having been bought and sold like beasts, to be slaves in the West Indies; than to enjoy all the liberties of British subjects, and to continue under the dominion of our own depravity. For, whatever may be our situation as to secular bondage, if we do but possess peace in our consciences through atoning blood, and freedom from the power of corruption through regenerating grace; we are the freemen of Christ, and heirs of immortal glory.

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